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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by the Third World Institute, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

1. Thirty years after the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and 15 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, women all around the world still struggle for gender equality and respect for their human rights and freedoms. Despite certain progress, discrimination against women still prevails in all spheres of public life. The United Nations Member States still have not fully implemented their commitments to gender equality as an essential condition for sustainable economic and social development.

2. The Third World Institute is the host organization of the international secretariat of Social Watch, a network of civil society coalitions in over 70 countries that have monitored anti-poverty and gender equity policies since 1995. The Social Watch reports (see www.socialwatch.org) are based on the findings of citizen organizations around the world monitoring their own Governments and the analysis and processing of international statistics. Social Watch computes yearly a gender equity index to provide an internationally comparable benchmark of progress towards equity in education, economic empowerment and political voice for women.

3. The evolution of the gender equity index shows that in most countries, notable achievements have been accomplished as regards women's political participation and establishing gender quotas, inclusion in the labour market, developing institutional mechanisms for gender equality and legislation to address gender equality and violence against women, in particular domestic violence and trafficking.

4. However, there is an evident gap between legislation and implementation. The Social Watch national coalitions report setbacks in the struggle against poverty and for gender equality. The current financial and economic crisis has exacerbated gender inequalities throughout the world. This regression is also stressed in the United Nations *Millennium Development Goals Report 2009*. It concludes that the crises may also hold back progress towards gender equality by creating new hurdles to women's employment. Their weaker control over property and resources, overrepresentation in piece-rate or vulnerable employment, lower earnings and lower levels of social protection make them, and their children, more vulnerable to the financial and economic crisis.

5. The reactions to the economic crisis have involved cutbacks in financing social services such as health care, child care, social protection and education in many countries. These cuts have contributed to increasing the risk of feminization of poverty. The estimates are that women will enter the post-crisis period with a heavier burden of unpaid work in a family and more difficult access to decent jobs and social services, if their rights are not effectively and fully protected, as demanded by international human rights documents.

6. What is also worrying is the absence of women's participation in solving the crisis and in economic decision-making. Gender equality machineries, women's groups and women experts are, as a rule, excluded from the process of shaping economic decisions at both national and international levels.

7. The Social Watch national reports indicate that both the national and the international responses to the global crisis present gender-unaware, business-as-

usual approaches including a further deregulation and liberalization of markets and trade as solutions to dilute the crisis. The lack of reference to the States' accountability for their commitments to implement international human rights standards suggests that States consider that they may lessen them in times of crisis.

8. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as other human rights standards, should provide a binding framework for accountability of States and non-State actors, as well as international financial institutions. The accountability mechanisms should include gender-based statistics, gender-responsive indicators and gender-responsive budgeting, together with a human rights-based approach, to strengthen women's empowerment and contribute to achieving gender equality and social justice. The road map to prosperity for all is to invest in people and gender equality.